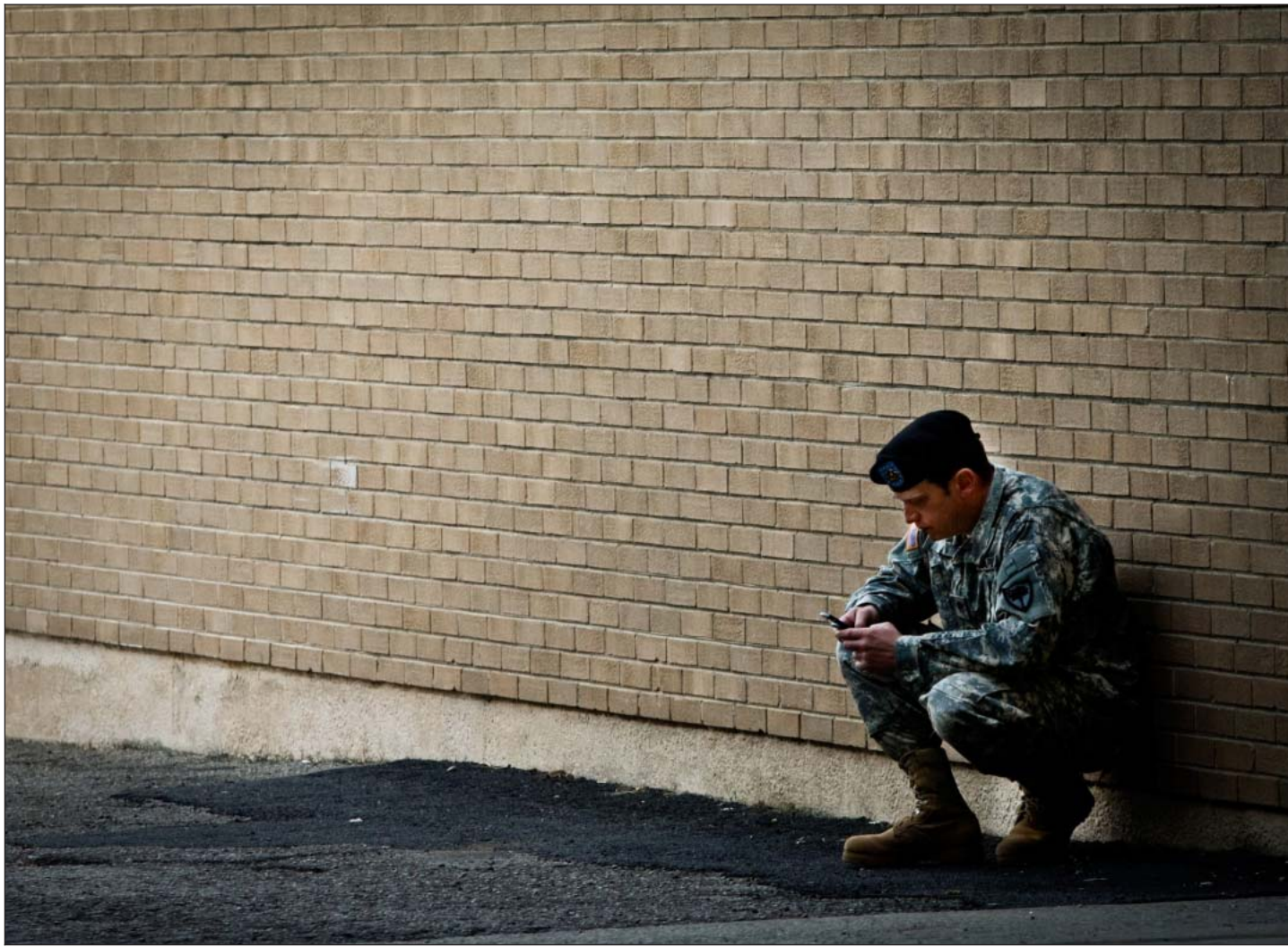


"Saying goodbye to your family at the airport is the hard part."

Sgt. Robert Hill of West Columbia, one of the South Carolina Army National Guard members being deployed to Afghanistan



PHOTOGRAPHS BY TIM DOMINICK/TDOMINICK@THESTATE.COM

Staff Sgt. Joseph Johnson texts his girlfriend before the deployment ceremony for 120 soldiers. She was working and couldn't be at the ceremony Friday in Columbia.

GUARD'S GOODBYE

120 soldiers prepare to deploy to Afghanistan for a year

By **JEFF WILKINSON**
jwilkinson@thestate.com

The next 12 months will be a scary time for 20-year-old Samantha Simmonds of Springfield.

Her 23-year-old husband, Sgt. Daniel Simmonds, an electronics specialist with the S.C. Army National Guard's 742nd Support Maintenance Company, will leave Sunday for a one-year deployment in southern Afghanistan. And she'll have to depend on other family members to help care for their 1-year-old son, Ryan, and 2-year-old daughter, Kairi.

"It's scary because you don't know if he's coming back," she said. "But I have my kids and I can't let the stress show."

About 350 family and



Spc. Alexis Willingham and her daughter, Brianna, 2, spend time together before the deployment ceremony.

friends gathered at the National Guard Armory in Columbia Friday for a formal departure ceremony for the 120

soldiers. It is the second deployment of S.C. Army National Guard troops to Afghanistan in a

ONLINE

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week, and the third in a year.

The 742nd SMC, headquartered at McEntire Joint National Guard Base in Eastover, will leave Sunday for Fort Hood, Texas, for a month of final pre-deployment training, before leaving for Afghanistan in late March.

The mission of the 742nd is maintenance of vehicles, small arms and electronics equipment.

It will be the first tour for more than 50 percent of the soldiers, company commander Lt. Bryan Padgett said, even

SEE **GUARD** PAGE **B10**

DILLON DOG ATTACK

Woman mauled to death in garden

Neighbor's Rottweilers kill 66-year-old outside her home

By **MEG KINNARD**
The Associated Press

Sirlinda Hayes was working in her garden as she did every day, tending turnips and collard greens on a small plot outside her modest one-story home.

Moments later, the Dillon woman was dead, mauled by two neighborhood dogs that had gotten loose many times before but had not acted aggressively toward humans.

"Never had no trouble," Nijoku Odom, Hayes' nephew, told The Associated Press Friday, a day after his aunt was attacked. "They've gotten loose before — anybody could tell them

SEE **MAULING DEATH** PAGE **B5**

COMMUNITY HELPING HANDS

Colonial Life sets standard for giving

Colonial Life and its employees continued to set a standard for charitable contributions and community service last year.

The company donated more than \$700,000 to local charitable organizations in 2010, while employees volunteered more than 11,000 hours to their favorite causes.

The financial contributions included company-allocated dollars to various organizations along with employee gifts and matching company dollars.

"Being a strong community partner is part of our history and a key part of our culture," said Randy Horn, Colonial Life president and CEO. "It's one of the things employ-



Bertram Rantin
brantin@thestate.com
(803) 771-8306

ees value most about working here, and they demonstrate that with their own pocketbooks and helping hands."

The United Way of the Midlands was the largest beneficiary of Colonial's charitable giving last year as it received more than \$420,000.

Other major company contribu-

SEE **GIVING** PAGE **B2**

GOP PRIMARY

S.C. race warming up after slow start

Potential presidential candidates starting to show up in state

By **JIM DAVENPORT**
The Associated Press

Republican presidential hopefuls are starting to make the rounds in South Carolina, though they're not rushing to the state the way they were in the run-up to the wide-open 2008 race.

Some have been knocking around regularly since President Barack Obama took office in 2009 and others are riding November's post-election and tea party-driven GOP tide in this first-in-the-South Republican primary battleground state.

While the primary date isn't set, the first debate will go off on May 5.

It's noticeably slower going than in 2007, when presidential campaigns already were hiring staff and spending heavily a year ahead of the primary.

"There's beginning to be an uptick in traffic, but it's certainly not to the point it was the last time," said Joel Sawyer, executive director of the state Republican Party. That will change rapidly, he said, when candidates begin to declare plans.

But some, including, Minnesota U.S. Rep. Michele Bachmann, say that could be months away.

"I think there's a natural timeline for candidates to have to look at," said Bachmann, who planned to make her first trip this weekend. She'll be followed by former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum, who will be making his 10th visit to the state since 2009.

"I would anticipate a person would probably have to make a decision by early summer sometime," Bachmann said. "It may be possible to forestall that decision until September. But I think that would be at the latest."

SEE **GOP PRIMARY** PAGE **B5**

S.C. WILDFIRE DANGER

Outdoor burning warning issued

From Staff and Wire Reports

S.C. forestry officials are pleading with people not to do any outdoor burning this weekend.

The Forestry Commission says warm temperatures, low humidity and high winds forecast for the long President's Day weekend will increase the chances of a devastating wildfire.

In the Midlands, too, temperatures Saturday and Sunday are expected to be in the 70s, with no chance of rain.

The commission cannot ban outdoor burning, but officials say they will aggressively enforce laws that require anyone burning outdoors to notify the commission.

Authorities say they also will ticket anyone who loses control of a fire.

So far this month, the Forestry Commission has responded to 226 fires across the state and the heart of the wildfire season has not arrived.

Among those were Midlands area fires reported, including one in Lexington County that burned 30 to 40 acres of woods and brush Monday, and two in the Lower Richland on areas between 5 and 10 acres.

SOUTH CAROLINA DEATHS

Norris "Pete" Alewine, Lexington
Theresa "Terry" Barrett, Chapin
Leona Bell, Kingstree
Emily Berry, Blythewood
Joseph Bond III, Columbia
Clara Brannon, Columbia
William Brazell, Columbia

Jackie Clay, Lexington
Robert Corbett Sr., Lexington
Marvin Davis, Bishopville
Frank Fowler Jr., North Myrtle Beach
Frances Frick, Columbia
Ronnie Gamble, White Rock

Barbara Hayes, Columbia
Sirlinda Hayes, Dillon
Joseph "Ed" Hoffman, Camden
Thomas Howle, Hartsville
Martha Jackson, Orangeburg
Charlie Johnson Jr., Fairfax
Alvin Kimble III, Gaston

Bobby Long, Columbia
George McDow Sr., Lancaster
E.B. Melton, Chesterfield
Theo Mobley, Heath Springs
Billy Moon, Columbia
Howard "Pete" Oliver, Hartsville

Leonard Proctor, Lugoff
Renate Senior, Columbia
Cornelia Spires, Pelion
Gottfriede Smith, Columbia
William Stroud, Chesterfield
Robert Thomas, Greeleyville
Isaac Thompson III,

Columbia
Sadie Want, Charleston
Louise Williams, Orangeburg
Emily Wilson, Irmo
Virginia Yarborough, Saluda

DETAILS, B4